



a message from the

*Program  
Manager*

Dear Friends,

The VA has made an additional increase for mileage reimbursement for veterans traveling to the VA for care. The new rate effective January 9, 2009 is 41.5 cents per mile for all VA travel including C&P exams. Travel benefits are subject to some deductibles. Check with the travel clerk when you are at the VA for an appointment to see if you qualify for any travel pay.

VA recently learned of a problem in which some surviving spouses did not receive a compensation or pension payment they should have received for the month of a veteran's death. Surviving spouses who believe they may be entitled to this retroactive month of death benefit should call toll free **1-800-749-8387**.

Take advantage of your VA health care and have all your immunizations and preventive care tests done in your Primary Care Clinic.

*Bunny Mizzell, LISW-CP*

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Women Veterans Program Manager  
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## Traumatic Brain Injury . . .

*the Hallmark Injury of the Iraq and Afghanistan Wars*

Traumatic brain injury (TBI) is usually the result of a sudden, violent blow to the head that launches the brain on a collision course with the inside of the skull. This collision can cause the brain to bruise, tear nerve fibers and cause bleeding.



Symptoms of a TBI can be mild, moderate, or severe, depending on the extent of the damage to the brain.

In the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, our military men and women have been hit by powerful roadside explosions. The force of this blast instantly overcomes the victim and can cause the brain to shake which causes damage to the brain. In most of these cases, the skull remains intact and the damage is believed to be caused by a pressure wave of the explosion's concussive force passing through the brain. TBI's are also caused by rocket propelled grenades, bullets piercing the skull and oth-

er battlefield hazards.

The VA has established polytrauma centers across the country to treat these warriors returning from the battlefield. The VA provides seamless transition for the patients from the military hospitals to the VA. These polytrauma centers are specially staffed with rehabilitation personnel.

The brain controls movement, behaviors, thoughts, and sensations, so a TBI can have wide-ranging physical and psychological effects. The immediate physical effects include bruising and swelling. When injured brain tissue swells up, it creates a second, delayed problem – pressure. As the injured tissue expands, it pushes against the skull with increasing force

severe TBI patients will need surgery to remove or repair hematomas (ruptured blood vessels) or contusions (bruised brain tissue). Disabilities resulting from a TBI depend upon the severity of the injury to the brain, the location of the injury in the brain, and the age and general health of the individual. Some common disabilities include: headaches, dizziness, problems with thinking, memory, and reasoning, sight, hearing, touch, taste, and smell, change in behaviors, personality changes, aggression, acting out, and social inappropriateness. The most common of these impairments is short-term memory loss. That means the injured person recalls information from be-

*Therapy focuses on regaining lost skills and learning ways to compensate for abilities that have been permanently changed.*

and causes additional damage. Anyone with signs of a TBI should seek medical attention as soon as possible. Because little can be done to reverse the initial brain damage caused by the trauma, medical personnel try to stabilize an individual with TBI and focus on preventing further injury.

Approximately half of

fore the head trauma, but has to struggle to learn new information after the head trauma.

Unfortunately, some TBI injuries may go unnoticed at first until the injured start showing symptoms. Some may be in denial that anything is wrong with them. It is important for families to get medical attention as soon as possible.

# Celebrate Women's History . . . Share Your Story

**“We felt like pioneers,” recalls Jeanne Holm, who served her country for 33 years, becoming the first Air Force woman to be promoted to brigadier general and the first woman in the U.S. Armed Forces to become a major general.**



Jeanne Holm

Starting out as an Army truck driver, Jeanne Holm made her way up the ranks while fighting to expand the roles and opportunities for women in the armed forces. In her retirement, she continued her fight for women's equality in the military. She was appointed as the Special Assistant to President Gerald Ford and served on the Defense Advisory Committee on Women in the Services. And in following administrations, she served as a consultant on military women to the Under Secretary of the Air Force and chaired the Veterans Administration Committee on Women Veterans.

Holm's videotaped personal story is part of the Veterans History Project at the Li-

brary of Congress American Folklife Center. She is featured as part of the "Women at War" website ([www.loc.gov/vets/stories/ex-war-womenatwar.html](http://www.loc.gov/vets/stories/ex-war-womenatwar.html)), which includes stories from nurses, civilian codebreakers, a flight surgeon, a welder, and trailblazing officers—including Holm as well as Darlene Iskra who became the first woman to command a U.S. Navy ship in 1990.

The Veterans History Project has collected stories from more than 60,000 individuals—but only 3,729 of them are from women.

In South Carolina, nearly 350 men have submitted their stories while only 16 women have. In North Carolina, nearly 1,000 men compared to only 45 women

have submitted their personal accounts. In Georgia, nearly 1,100 men compared to 96 women have told their stories.

The Veterans History Project encourages more women to submit their stories. The project's goal is to collect, preserve and share with future generations the stories of all American war veterans and the civilians who supported them, from World War I through current conflicts.

Audio and video taped interviews as well as original photographs, illustrations, letters, diaries, and other personal documents are used to tell these stories. Volunteer interviewers record stories of veterans and send them to the project.

*To participate or obtain more information about the Veterans History Project, call (888) 371-5848, send an email to [vohp@loc.gov](mailto:vohp@loc.gov), or visit [www.loc.gov/vets](http://www.loc.gov/vets).*



Concerning Women is offered to provide health information.

Medical advice should be obtained from your health care provider. If you would like to provide any suggestions or story ideas email us at [vhachaconcerningwomen@va.gov](mailto:vhachaconcerningwomen@va.gov) or check out the latest news on our website [www.charleston.va.gov](http://www.charleston.va.gov). Questions or comments, please call (843) 789-7260. Editors: Bunny Mizzell and Heather Friesen

## March is National Women's History Month



Ensure that the history of women will be recognized and celebrated throughout the country. This is the time to share stories of women's historic achievements to generate a greater vision of what a woman can do.



# Financial Hardship Assistance Through VA

If you are a veteran currently enrolled and receiving VA health care services, but are now having problems with your VA health care debt, there are several programs that could provide assistance.

**VA's Medical Care Hardship Program** may be able to help veterans qualify for VA enrollment for health care services if they had a recent change in their income, even if they were previously denied enrollment based on their household income. Veterans who have put off applying for VA enrollment because they thought their income was too high may want to reconsider applying if their projected current year's income is lower. Hardship may be approved if the veteran's current year income is substantially reduced from the prior year. Personal circumstances such as loss of employment, sudden decrease in income or increases in out of pocket veteran or family health care expenses factor into VA's hardship determination.

**Repayment Plan** – Veterans having a problem making copays may contact their VA health care facility to request that a repayment plan be established. If approved, the plan

will consider both the current income and anticipated future income in making this determination. Most offers in compromise that are accepted must be for a lump sum payment payable

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nificant expenses for funeral arrangements, veteran's educational expenses or for medical care for the veteran or other family members. Waivers must be requested in writing within 180 days from the date of the statement on which the charge first appears. VA can also waive the travel mileage reimbursement deductible for eligible veterans.

**Having a VA means test** (concerning financial information) done annually can save veterans many copays. Copays are based on this annual financial information. If the financial information is not correct, the veteran could be paying copays despite the fact that he/she is eligible for exemption. A means test can be completed at the VA Medical Center or VA Community Clinics.

For additional information and qualifications for these specific assistance programs, veterans may contact **VA's Health Benefits Service Center** toll free at 1-877-222-8387.



will result in a more affordable monthly payment by spreading their payments over a 12 month period of time. To avoid administrative charges, the veterans must establish a written payment plan within 30 days of the statement date. Veterans would need to notify their VA health care

**Compromise Plan** – Veterans who are unable to pay their debt in full or clear the debt in a reasonable timeframe through monthly payments, may request a compromise. A compromise means VA can accept a lesser amount of money as full settlement of the veteran's debt. VA

in full 30 days from the date of the acceptance of the offer.

**Waiver Plan** – VA can waive a veterans existing health care debt when there has been a job loss or significant decrease in income or the veteran has experienced significant decrease in income or the veteran has experienced sig-

## New Education Benefits Available

The "Post-9/11 GI Bill" is a new education benefit program that gives veterans with active duty service on or after September 11, 2001, enhanced educational benefits similar to those provided to veterans following World War II.

The Post-9/11 GI Bill may be used for a VA-approved training program beginning on or after August 1, 2009. The new program provides up to 36 months of benefits that can be used during the 15-year period

following discharge.

The Post-9/11 GI Bill offers tuition payments for approved training up to the cost of the most expensive in-state undergraduate tuition at a public institution of higher education.

A monthly housing stipend is paid if the veteran is attending school more than half-time in a classroom setting.

The veteran also receives up to \$1,000 annually for books and supplies.

The percentage of tuition costs, housing allowances, and books and supplies a veteran is entitled to is based on the veteran's length of active duty.

The Post-9/11 GI Bill also makes it easier for veterans to transfer unused educational benefits to their spouses and children.

*For more about the Post-9/11 GI Bill, go to <http://www.gibill.va.gov> or call 1-888-GI-BILL-1 (1-888-442-4551).*

# Important VA Phone Numbers

## Charleston VA Medical Center

**843-577-5011** or toll free **1-888-878-6884**

### Telephone Advice Line

**843-789-6400** or toll free at **1-888-878-6884**

Veterans who need medical advice from their Primary Care provider or have questions about their medications can call the TAP line Monday through Friday from 8:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.

### Scheduling an Appointment

**843-789-6500** or toll free at **1-888-878-6884**

Veterans who need to schedule, cancel or reschedule an appointment for all Primary Care Clinics including Myrtle Beach, Savannah, Beaufort and Goose Creek can call Monday through Friday from 8:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.

### Automated Prescription Refill Line

**843-577-5011 extension 5220** or toll free at **1-888-878-6884 extension 5220**

Veterans who need to request a refill of a prescription or check the status of refills can call 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Have your social security number and prescription numbers ready when calling.

### VA Benefits (other than healthcare)

**1-800-827-1000**

Veterans who need information on VA benefits including VA pension and compensation, home loans and education can call the VA Regional Office.

### Billing Questions

**1-866-258-2772**

Veterans who have questions about a bill received from the Charleston VA Medical Center can call the VA Revenue Center.

### Suicide Prevention

**1-800-273-TALK (8255) Press 1 for Veterans**

Veterans can call the VA Suicide Prevention Lifeline to talk to trained professionals 24 hours a day, seven days a week or visit our website [www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org](http://www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org).

For more information on VA related topics visit [www.charleston.va.gov](http://www.charleston.va.gov).

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